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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 002271

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DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN UPDATE-NOVEMBER 29-30

REF: A. CARACAS 2262

- [1](#)B. CARACAS 2258
- [1](#)C. CARACAS 2254
- [1](#)D. CARACAS 2245

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES FOR 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Following the November 29 final, substantial rally of the "No" camp, President Chavez canceled a planned visit to Ecuador. Instead, he prepared for his final "Yes" campaign speech on November 30 rally, while his Zamora Command alleged domestic conspiracies to reject a "Yes" victory. Chavez predicted victory in the December 2 referendum and told the massive "Yes" rally that "A 'Yes' vote is a vote for Chavez, and a 'No' vote is a vote for George W. Bush. The National Election Commission (CNE) is finalizing voting stations. A limited number of foreign missions are preparing to observe the polls. Although opposition leaders believe they can defeat the reforms, they say they are prepared to accept defeat in a transparent election, but will challenge a fraudulent vote. There is, however, no consensus about who will speak for the opposition after the election. End Summary.

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"Yes" Supporters Close Campaign  
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[1](#)2. (C) Red banners, shirts and hats blanketed Avenida Bolivar during the late afternoon closing rally of the "Yes" campaign on November 30. Poloffs observing from one of the gathering points saw many more busses than they had the day before for the "No" rally. Emboffs confirmed numerous reports of government employees being required to attend the "Yes" rally. Some of the participants' shirts indicated that beneficiaries of various social missions also attended. President Chavez addressed the rally of well over 100,000 persons in what appeared to be an even bigger gathering than the "No" rally in the same place the day before.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Chavez started his speech by embracing his infant grandson and leading the crowd in the national anthem. Chavez framed the upcoming referendum as a battle against the United States ("the empire") and "its lackeys in Venezuela." He bellowed, "A 'Yes' vote is a vote for Chavez and a 'No' vote is a vote for George W. Bush. That's the real fight." Chavez predicted the "Yes" camp would deliver a "knockout to American imperialism." He also told the crowd that Venezuelan intelligence agencies foiled an attempt to

assassinate him at the closing "Yes" rally.

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Chavez is Saving Himself For the Next Fight  
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¶4. (SBU) Comando Zamora director and Telecommunication Minister Jesse Chacon announced that the "Yes" camp would respect the official results of the National Electoral Council (CNE) and, making an indirect jab at opposition mayor Henrique Capriles Radonski, added that none of the "No" block members had made a similar pledge. Chacon pledged that the state would maintain order and would not permit another April 11, (the day in 2002 when Chavez was temporarily removed from office). In that same press conference, Chacon declared to have video proof of a plot by opposition Mayor Leopoldo Lopez and political commentator Alejandro Pena Esclusa to unleash a chain of violent protests against a "Yes" win.

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Opposition Preparations  
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¶5. (C) Primero Justicia (PJ) Secretary General Carlos Ocariz told Poloff November 30 that the opposition is preparing for three referendum scenarios: a narrow 'Yes' victory, a narrow 'No' victory, and government fraud to achieve a substantial 'Yes' victory. He said his party would not do exit polling (lack of time and resources), but would do a 'quick count' of over 300 representative polling stations to gauge the validity of the official results. The combined opposition is also running another separate, but less sophisticated 'quick count' of 122 polling stations. Ocariz said opposition parties are still trying to decide who will speak for them after the CNE releases its results, adding that it will not be unsuccessful 2006 presidential candidate Manuel Rosales. He said the opposition would recognize a transparent 'Yes' victory, but may not

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recognize the constitutional reforms as legitimate. The opposition parties are considering organizing a post-referendum signature campaign to try to convoke a new constitutional convention as a way to keep the opposition united and continue to fight Chavez' sweeping constitutional reforms.

¶6. (C) Baruta Mayor Henrique Capriles Radonski told PolCouns November 30 that he was confident of a 'No' victory, but also said the opposition would even accept defeat if the margin was small and the election was transparent. As a result of the November 29 march, Capriles thought enough voters would participate, but the key would be ensuring that opposition witnesses were present at all voting tables, a project he said the opposition was still working on. Capriles thought there was a possibility for systematic low-level violence as a nervous BRV would seek to intimidate voters to guarantee victory. He also expected the government to try to control the media and shut down opposition-affiliated news channel Globovision at the first sign of any reports predicting a Chavez defeat.

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Electoral NGO Skeptical of "Yes" Prospects  
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¶7. (C) Separately, Sumate,s Roberto Abdul told Poloff November 30 that he was pessimistic about the prospects of a 'No' victory. In addition to not providing enough witnesses for the polls, he thought the opposition still had not convinced voters that Chavez could be defeated. As most people like to side with a perceived winner, he predicted turn out would either be lower than expected or more people, though in disagreement with the reform, would vote Yes. Abdul said Sumate would do a quick count as well. He thought the prospect for violence would depend on how the opposition

responded to a loss and political leaders, ability to rally their followers.

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Baduel Still Vocal  
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¶8. (SBU) Former Defense Minister and "No" vote campaigner Raul Baduel called on the military high command not to tarnish the reputation of the institution by getting involved in politics. He also reminded the Supreme Court of the "irreparable harm" these changes would cause "if allowed to pass."

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Studies and Observations  
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¶9. (C) Embassy Caracas will field teams of election observers in Caracas and eight states. The British, Canadian, French German, Austrian and Chilean missions will also send out observers around greater metropolitan Caracas. The Norwegian embassy will be working with the Venezuelan electoral observation NGO "OJO Electoral." Although schools, which are frequently polling stations, had been closed 48 hours earlier, the National Election Center (CNE) announced they would start installing the 33,614 electronic voting machines around the country on November 30. The Ministry of Education has closed schools and universities through Tuesday, December ¶04. As it has done in the past the CNE announced they had invited judges and others experts from 38 countries as far reaching as Namibia and Finland to watch the election. Unlike previous elections, there will be no accredited observers from the European Union and the OAS. The opposition is hosting 20 parliamentarians from Europe and Latin America.

¶10. (SBU) The European Commission released a statement stressing that constitutional reforms "should reinforce democracy and the rule of law." The communique goes on to point out that a constitution should be based on broad popular consensus reflecting the plurality and diversity of a nation.

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Fractures in Chavismo  
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¶11. (SBU) National Secretary Rafael Uzcategui of Patria Para Todos (PPT), a pro-government party, predicts a loud and intense internal debate following the December 2 vote. He

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explained that there is a large philosophical divide between Chavez' United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and the PPT which seeks to maintain its independent status. He believes the first debate would be about socialism and the danger of sectarianism and authoritarianism which have plagued other revolutions.

¶12. (SBU) The PSUV mayor of Samuel Dario Maldonado, in Tachira state, denounced the constitutional reform as a "trick" that would not "better the lives of the people." While declaring he still supports President Chavez, he said he was leaving the PSUV, not wanting to be part of "a party that only has one way of thinking."

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CNE Vs CNN  
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¶13. (SBU) Calling the CNN mix-up of an image of Chavez and the caption "Who killed him?" an act against the peace and stability of Venezuela, Reporters For the Truth, a pro-Chavez Venezuelan NGO, filed a motion asking the National Election Center not to permit any CNN correspondents to cover the vote.

